

The Resurrection of Our Lord (A/RCL)
John 20.1-18
March 27, 2005
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

On Friday we hosted the 9th annual Good Morning, Good Friday event for our Holy Trinity children, grandchildren and neighbors ☺. We work hard each year to translate the story of Good Friday into terms that little people can understand. Overall, I think we succeed. The children and youth who have attended Good Morning, Good Friday as far back as they can remember probably know more details of the Passion story than many adults here do!

Each year we walk the Way of the Cross through this building, and at each stop along the way we give the children a memento for their remember bag, a memory cue so they can tell the story to others. This year we paused on the Sorrowful Way, the Via Dolorosa, the cobble-stoned avenue cutting through the marketplace of Jerusalem, along which Jesus walked and stumbled to His crucifixion on Calvary. We talked about Jesus falling on the way, scraping knees, barking His shins and the palms of His hands. We gave the children band-aids for their remember bags, to remember how Jesus bled and hurt, for love of us, on the first Good Friday.

After I explained that to one of the five groups of children who walked the Way of the Cross, little Alex got my attention, shook his head, raised his eyebrows and announced, “I still don’t get why it’s called ‘Good.’” And then I realized, at this rate I’m **never** going to be nominated as teacher of the year! The truth outs.... “Pastor Mary, I still don’t get why it’s called ‘Good.’”

Sure, I can and do tell the children that it’s **sad** that Jesus suffered and died, but it’s **glad** that He did it all out of love for us and won our salvation. The sadness and

gladness is, He died so that we can live, and God raised Him up again and **will** raise us up along with Him. But when we talk about Jesus needing a band-aid for His bloody knee, that's very real to a child. Band-aids and skinned knees hit close to home. Alex taught me that sad overwhelms glad when you're six years old and you've just put a band-aid in your remember bag.

Sad also overwhelms glad when you're an adult standing in a cemetery. What you know with your head doesn't count for a lot when you hurt so badly you can barely breathe. At the funeral of any of **my** loved ones, I know I've done a lot more **feeling** than **thinking**. Mary Magdalene sure did, too. She was so emotionally overwhelmed by Jesus' violent death, so panicked at the absence of His body from the tomb, that she couldn't think **or** see straight. She saw two **angels** sitting on the rock shelf where Jesus' body had lain, and she **overlooked** it....

Regardless of whether she recognized them as angels, wasn't it pretty surprising to find **any** living people in a tomb? They confronted her with the probing question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" and she obediently answered, as if in a daze, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." St. John says:

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but **she did not know** that it was Jesus. [Because you see, she could not think **or** see straight!] Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener [because she made a crazy snap judgment that he may have been the body snatcher!]... she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Mary Magdalene wasn't one of the twelve apostles, but she was a **close** disciple of Jesus. She had certainly heard Him predict **more than once** that He would suffer, die **and rise again** on the third day. But His dying, death, burial acted like a virus that wiped

her hard drive clean. She seemed to have no emotional **or** intellectual recall that His death had been predicted and His resurrection ensured.

I don't know about you, but I've **been** there, laid **so** low by grief or grim circumstance that faith has come hard or barely at all. I admit, my faith is not at its strongest, standing at the open grave of a loved one, newly planted in the earth, living proof of the Ash Wednesday scenario, "dust to dust, ashes to ashes." In those desolate moments, I'm quite sure Jesus has asked **me**, "Woman, why are you weeping?" not to **indict** me of unfaith but to **coax** me toward insight, to keep the dialogue alive, to engage me when I feel most alone.

Like Mary Magdalene, I, too, have sometimes assumed that He is the gardener turned body snatcher, the cause of my pain, the problem rather than the solution. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." But **oh**, Lord, **why??**

He **is** the Gardener, you know. Unlike us **human** gardeners, though, He doesn't just **cooperate with** or **watch over** growth. He **makes the transformation happen**. We don't speak of gardeners "burying" seeds or bulbs. We say they "plant" them. And we don't speak of seeds "dying;" we say they "germinate".... And yet, in St. John's Gospel, Jesus reworks both gardening and dying by pointing out, "...[U]nless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12.24). And St. Paul says:

...[S]omeone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! [St. Paul could be kind of harsh ☺.] What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed.... There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another...

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body....

[St. Paul continues:]

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable... When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 15.35-37, 40, 42-44, 50, 54-57

Mary Magdalene went to the cemetery garden on the first Easter morning to “bury” her Lord by anointing His body and carefully wrapping spices in the winding sheet. What she didn’t realize was that **He was risen, alive in a whole new way**, awaiting her arrival, ready to **raise her up** from the depths of grief and unbelief, an even more incredible gift than once having cast seven demons out of her....

In cemeteries closer to home, when **we** have a hard time holding onto the truth of the resurrection, when we echo Alex, confessing, “I still don’t get why it’s called ‘Good,’ the Gardener appears to us also, forgiving our forgetfulness, understanding our slowness to recognize Him, and calling us by name.

Christ is risen, alleluia! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Olson